

Garden House Open to nature

Russian For Fish extends North London Victorian terrace – without sacrificing garden space



The downside to almost every home extension is the fact it eats into your garden space. What you gain indoors, you lose out of them. If you happen to be a devoted gardener, then extending your living space can feel like a compromise too far.

This was the dilemma facing the owners of a Victorian mid-terrace in Stoke Newington, N16. One was a keen cook and entertainer, who wanted to expand their kitchen and ground-floor space accordingly; the other was a dedicated gardener,

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who was concerned that a bigger house would mean a smaller garden. Russian For Fish were the architects charged with squaring the circle.

Serendipity brought the owners to Russian For Fish. The firm was engaged on a project on a neighbouring street when windy weekend weather dislodged a tarpaulin and set it flapping in the storm. A concerned call to co-director Nilesh Shah at the Russian For Fish office swiftly led to the problem being solved – and to a new commission.

The property already had a small extension housing the dining room. Built in the 1980s from red brick that did not match the rest of the house, this was past its prime. The owners knew they wanted more kitchen and dining space, but couldn't decide whether to opt for a rear extension and sacrifice some of their garden, or to extend into their unused side return, which would have meant losing a window into their sitting room study space, casting it into darkness. Russian For Fish found a way to do both.

Giving back the garden

By developing a full-width extension design with a green roof, Russian For Fish were able to ensure that the footprint of the space available for plants and wildlife was undiminished, despite the considerable volume added to the house.



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The roof was provided by the living roof specialists Pritchard & Pritchard, seeded with wildflowers and sedum. Because it consists of an interlocking tile system, individual sections can be easily replaced if needed.

To prevent the loss of light to the sitting room, which doubled as the client's study, Russian For Fish devised an extension that gave them the full width of the rear of the house, including the side return, but also created an enclosed courtyard space of around 1m x 2.5m that could be accessed from the new kitchen.



From a single rear garden, the house now has three distinct growing environments: the new, multi-level garden area containing raised beds and a pond, a living roof, and the courtyard – a gardener's dream and a haven for biodiversity.

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Mid-century materials

Properties in this area are set on a slope, which meant Russian For Fish's plans had to accommodate several changes of level, and consider the issue of head height throughout the house, as well as ensuring that the material and colour palettes tied all aspects of the space into a coherent whole.

Both owners were fans of the mid-century design aesthetic, and this formed the basis for the interior design. For the doors to the garden and courtyard, Russian For Fish used chunky timber frames in utile wood from North Kent Joinery, which has a dark and reddish look, akin to the classic mid-century materials of mahogany or teak. They also used utile to surround a skylight above the side-return part of the extension, covering the joints in the off-the-shelf glazing system.



These frames help direct the eye around the space and the utile acts as one of the common material threads through the space – as does a yellow brick paver from Chelmer Valley, which is used in both the kitchen floor and the garden, as well as the refurbished ground-floor WC and a newly created utility room in the basement.

Kitchen sinks

The new, open-plan kitchen dining space is the highlight of the project in terms of both functionality and aesthetics. To create head space and mitigate the effect of the ground floor's multiple levels, Russian For Fish and principal project contractor

MJ Construction & Design lowered the kitchen area by an extra step (a logically complex operation that required them to adjust the foundations).

For the cabinetry, IKEA carcasses were fitted with bespoke doors in a pale, grey-green tone. These were complemented with worktops and a splashback in white-on-white Altrock – the hard-wearing terrazzo surface material made from reclaimed marble, created by designer Robin Grasby.



Opposite the kitchen units, beside a wall of bespoke white shelving, the dining area features a long table lit by a row of Tala pendant lights with exposed bulbs that

enhance the mid-century feel. The skylight above, running the length of the roof, ensures the dining area is flooded with light by day.



With the project complete after six months on site, Russian For Fish's clients now have what at first might have seemed impossible – a beautiful and generously proportioned space to entertain, and a green haven that celebrates nature, right in the urban heart of North London.

For more info and images, please contact Emily Ward, emily@zetteler.co.uk.

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About Russian For Fish

Russian For Fish is an award-winning London-based architectural and design practice founded by RIBA-chartered architect Pereen d'Avoine in 2006. Now run by Pereen and co-director Nilesh Shah, the firm works on extension and new-build projects for both residential and commercial clients, and is especially adept at transforming compact spaces while striving for sustainability. Their work is characterised by simplified material palettes, contemporary and minimalist detailing, and a cohesive, sympathetic approach to surroundings.

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